

VZCZCXRO2441  
PP RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM  
DE RUEHBK #5249/01 2400749  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 280749Z AUG 06  
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1217  
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 005249

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, EAP/MLS, INR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/22/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [KPAO](#) [TH](#)  
SUBJECT: SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: TEACHERS AND EDUCATION

REF: A. BANGKOK 4917 (ISLAMIC SCHOOL VISIT)

- [1](#)B. BANGKOK 4592 (SCHOOLS TARGETED)
- [1](#)C. BANGKOK 4480 (CHINESE LANGUAGE IN SOUTH)
- [1](#)D. BANGKOK (REALITY ON THE GROUND)

Classified By: Political Counselor Susan M. Sutton. Reason 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Schools have been the focus of increased attention in the far south because of violence against teachers and reports of teacher transfers. Attacks on government teachers, traditionally honored in Thai society, are deeply symbolic because they are viewed as representatives of the Thai state in the South. This message offers a brief primer on the different types of schools that exist in the South. From ages 6-12, most children in the border provinces attend government primary schools; they receive their religious instruction at private Tadika schools. However, at the secondary level most students attend either Private Islamic schools which offer a mixed curriculum or Pondok schools which focus exclusively on Islamic studies. End Summary

#### VIOLENCE DIRECTED AGAINST TEACHERS

-----

[1](#)2. (C) Government schools in the South have been under increasing scrutiny because of violence against buildings and teachers (reftel B). Approximately 1,600 teachers (out of 23,693) have transferred out of schools in Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala since 2004. To fill the gap the government has recruited local substitute teachers or has sought other alternatives. Recently, the MOE announced that they would install 500 satellite dishes and related equipment in public schools in order to provide distance learning opportunities for students. An MOE official acknowledged that government teachers in rural areas are sometimes targeted by militants or by villagers reacting to a local arrest or some other provocation. Prasit Meksuwan, a member of the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) and president of the Federation of the Southern Border Provinces Teachers, believes that teachers are being targeted in order to shock Thai society, attract media coverage and demonstrate the government's weakness. Prasit said that estranged southerners viewed security forces as symbols of "Siamese" authority while teachers are seen as symbols of "Siamese" culture and a source of assimilation.

[1](#)3. (C) After Buddhist Monks, teachers have traditionally been accorded the highest respect in Thai culture. Teachers are given the honorific "arjhan" which conveys a sense of deep respect and deference. Attacks on teachers are deeply symbolic and resonate widely among the public. Prasit believes that militants are targeting teachers - often the

only permanent government official living in rural areas - as a deliberate strategy to intimidate them into leaving (reftel D). Mother's Day in Thailand was celebrated on August 12, the Queen's birthday, and every year the Royal family selects a mother to be Thailand's "mother of the year." This year's winner was the mother of the teacher who is in a coma after being beaten by a group of angry villagers in Narathiwat on May 19.

#### OVERVIEW OF EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH

-----

##### PRIMARY SCHOOLS

14. (C) Education in Thailand is compulsory for 9 years. There are 3 years of mandatory secondary education after six years of primary school. For students wishing to continue the government provides three more years of upper secondary education. Schools in southern Thailand are divided between government schools, private or quasi-private schools (mainly catering to or supported by the ethnic Chinese community - reftel C), private Islamic Schools, and Pondok and Tadika Islamic Schools. Most primary school children in Narathiwat, Yala and Pattani attend government schools. According to research by the Australian Embassy, approximately 80 percent of 225,463 children in grades 1-6 are enrolled in one of the 877 government primary schools administered by the Ministry of Education (MOE).

15. (C) Private "Tadika" schools provide Islamic education for students who attend government primary schools (aged 6-12). Tadika classes are usually held on weekends or after school outside of the government curriculum. In theory, the MOE helps administer the Tadika schools but in practice, government involvement appears to be limited. Registered

BANGKOK 00005249 002 OF 002

Tadikas receive a nominal subsidy from the government, but rely on donations for most expenses. There are no certification requirements to become a Tadika instructor beyond "knowledge of Islam," and classes can be held almost anywhere. According to MOE figures, there are 4,616 teachers at 1,605 registered Tadikas in the South providing instruction for approximately 168,418 students.

##### SECONDARY SCHOOLS

16. (C) The majority of Muslim parents send their children to government primary schools, where they learn Thai, but then overwhelmingly decide to continue their secondary education at an Islamic School. According to the Australian Embassy, seventy-five percent of 132,183 secondary students in the three border provinces attend Islamic schools. The majority attend one of 132 large private Islamic schools which are registered and supervised by the Bureau of Private Education Promotion at MOE (there are some 70 additional small, village-based private Islamic schools). There are 100,684 students enrolled in these schools, which offer a mixed curriculum of science, English and social studies and at least 10-12 hours per week of Islamic studies. Officially, there are 6,596 social science and 3,690 religious teachers at the private Islamic schools. The largest (which include the Attarkiah Islamiah School in Narathiwat and the Thammawittahya School in Yala - reftel A) have more than 4,000 students.

17. (C) Distinct from the private Islamic schools are "Pondoks" which focus full-time exclusively on Islamic studies. The total number of Pondoks is hard to determine as they are often small. According to MOE, there are 372 registered Pondok schools in the South (Pattani has 185, Yala 82, Songkhla 53, Narathiwat 49; Krabi, Pathumthani and Satun have one each). Since 2004, the MOE has made a renewed effort to register all Pondoks - offering financial incentives to schools that comply - but according to official estimates there are still approximately 240 unregistered

schools (other sources offer different estimates). Officially, there are 20,369 students attending Pondok in the far south.

18. (C) As with Tadikas, there are no established requirements to be a Pondok teacher beyond "knowledge of Islam." In practice, almost anyone can establish a Pondok - all you need is a single room in a house, a few students and a teacher with a primary school level "Islamic" education. Because of this the actual total number of Pondok is difficult, if not impossible, to determine. Students are not supposed to enter a Pondok before completing 9 years of general education, however, this rule is probably often ignored, especially in rural areas. Historically, a government effort to assert authority over the Pondok has met with strong resistance because the schools are seen as central to efforts to preserve Islamic and Malay culture and traditions.  
BOYCE